

A Comparison of Per Capita Food Availability in Tsarist
Russia and the USSR, 1913 and 1956

Although averages hide seasonal, regional and class variations in food consumption, all of which are probably significant in the Soviet Union, several facts stand out in a comparison of average food availability in 1913 and 1956. The present average diet continues to be primarily a diet of bread and potatoes, and has improved only moderately since 1913. Diets with such a high proportion of starch, and low proportion of animal products, are typical of countries with low levels of living. There has been some improvement in the availability of so-called "quality" foods and in some cases the percentage increases have been substantial. In general, however, the consumption of these foods was at a low level in 1913, so that even with the increases, per capita availability remains below that of most Western European countries.

The lack of any sizeable area climatically suitable for the winter production of vegetables, and of refrigeration and rapid transportation facilities, imposes even greater monotony in the diet during the winter season, when fresh or frozen fruits and vegetables are in extremely short supply and in many areas virtually unobtainable. The lack of refrigeration and rapid transportation facilities also adversely affects both the over-all availability and the regional distribution of food items such as meat, fish and milk.

The average Soviet diet is entirely adequate in calories, containing approximately as many calories as the average U.S. diet. Furthermore, the average Soviet diet does not appear to be deficient in any of the nutritive elements commonly recognized as necessary for the maintenance

of health. This diet is monotonous by U.S. standards, but since dietary tastes are apparently a function of habit, it is probably more palatable to the Soviets than to Americans or Western Europeans who are accustomed to quite a different diet. The fact that there have been some improvements in recent years probably also helps to make this diet more acceptable.